SR 530/Sauk River Corridor Study

SR 530 runs along the Sauk River from Darrington in Snohomish County to its confluence with the Skagit River near Rockport in Skagit County. While this is a distance of only 19 miles, it is one of the most problematic highway segments in the entire state. Conflicts between the highway and the river pose constant problems for the natural environment and the traveling public.

- The highway is located in the river channel migration zone. Its presence degrades the wild and scenic river values of the Sauk – free flow, water quality, fish habitat and aesthetics. Some past repair work involved rip rap and other treatments that are harmful to fish habitat.

- Floods and damage to the highway from erosion result in road closures and emergency project activities almost every season. If the highway collapses, it would block a vital transportation link for nearby communities, obstructing emergency access and suspending the flow of commerce.

There are many ideas about how to address this problem. The purpose of the corridor study is to evaluate these ideas and settle on a reasonable strategy that fulfills our responsibilities to the traveling public and natural environment.

Study objectives

We want long-term solutions to conflicts between the river and the highway. We also have an immediate responsibility to identify strategies that will help us maintain a safe, functioning highway while avoiding or minimizing negative impacts and optimizing mitigation when possible.

Process

What is the expected outcome of the corridor study?

The product of the corridor study will be a plan to address conflicts between SR 530 and the Sauk River to guide WSDOT's work on the highway.

Who makes the decision about "what's next"?

WSDOT will determine the recommendations in the corridor plan, with input and consent from governments and members of the public.

How will we determine the recommendations?

We will use research and technical analysis to evaluate each of the improvement options based on our evaluation criteria. This process is not a numerical formula that will calculate the correct answer; rather, we will use the information to point out advantages and disadvantages that will inform our recommendation.

Our analysis may find that some improvements that would further reduce highway/river conflicts exceed funding we can reasonably expect to be available in the next 20 years. We may not currently have the funding needed to complete these improvements, but that doesn't mean that the long-term solution will never happen. There may be funding sources available in the future that we haven't yet anticipated.

What effect does a recommendation have?

What it does:

- Creates a project record that documents support and opposition to improvement strategies.
- Identifies improvement options that WSDOT cannot support.
- Identifies recommended improvements as system needs.

What it does not:

- It does not guarantee funding for improvements.
- It does not prioritize projects against other WSDOT needs.
- It does not prevent other governments or members of the public from advocating for a particular improvement.

Improvement options

We will evaluate five options for addressing corridor problems:

1 – No action – respond to emergencies only
2 – Imminent threat
3 – Minor realignments
4 – Major relocation east
5 – Major relocation west (option A would cross the Sauk at Government Bridge and follow the existing highway alignment north; option B would extend north and cross the Skagit west of Rockport)

Evaluation criteria

We interviewed tribes; federal, state and local agencies; property owners and other stakeholders to identify a range of issues that should be considered as we assess options for improving the highway. The result is the following list of criteria that will guide our technical analysis and

reveal advantages and disadvantages associated with proposed improvement strategies.

Transportation

- Extent to which improvement option maintains and enhances safety
- Likelihood of roadway failure
- Potential for erosion
- Extent of likely repetitive repairs
- Extent to which improvement option produces long-term solutions
- Maintenance costs
- Extent to which improvement option affects access to private residential property, resource lands and recreation opportunities
- Extent to which improvement option produces early, tangible benefits

Environment

- Extent to which improvement affects fish, wildlife and plant species
- Extent to which improvement affects "Wild and Scenic River" characteristics
- Extent to which improvement option produces early, tangible benefits

Cultural Resources

Extent of impacts to cultural resources and sites

Land Use Activities

Extent of impacts to existing activities including residential, resource management and recreation

Constructability

- Likelihood that improvements can be constructed incrementally
- Potential for securing necessary funding
- Complexity of engineering, permitting and construction

Limitations

It would be irresponsible for WSDOT to support improvement strategies that do not meet the following commitments to the natural environment and traveling public.

In order to provide a safe, functioning highway we must:

- Provide a viable and safe transportation corridor between SR 20 and Darrington.

- Have a short-term strategy for avoiding roadway failures.
- Follow federal and state standards for highway design.
- Comply with laws and regulations associated with existing access rights.

In order to protect the natural environment we must:

- Avoid or minimize additional negative impacts to fish and wildlife habitat and optimize mitigation when necessary.
- Comply with all environmental laws and regulations.
- Weigh the benefit created by a proposed highway improvement strategy against any negative impacts it generates to ensure that we do not do more damage to the natural environment than we alleviate.

Next steps

We are now beginning work on our technical analysis to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed improvement options. The analysis will include a range of elements including a channel migration zone analysis. We will reconvene for a second meeting in July to review the results and discuss our recommendations for the corridor.

Meeting 2
Friday, July 24
10am to noon
WSDOT Mount Baker Area HQ, Burlington

Contact information

For additional project information, please contact:

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